

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
Cooperative Conservation Workshop  
April 22-23, 2008  
Washington DC**

**Workshop Summary**

On April 21, 2008, the U.S. Department of the Interior awarded Cooperative Conservation awards to partners involved in 22 projects across the Nation. Cooperative Conservation Awards recognize outstanding collaborative achievements in the field of conservation in communities and regions. On April 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, the award winners, stakeholders, and agency staff – about 100 individuals in all – met to share their approaches for successful conservation partnerships and to generate ideas for future conservation initiatives and collaborative opportunities.

**Workshop Format**

The workshop was organized around themes and challenges for cooperative conservation projects. Participants from each project provided an overview of the key accomplishments for their project. Then the panelists discussed some of the important lessons they had learned from their projects. Each panel concluded with questions and discussion from all the workshop participants. See more about the cooperative conservation projects on the website <http://cooperativeconservation.gov/awards2008/ceremonyrecipients.html>.

**Day One**

**Welcoming Address by Deputy Secretary Lynn Scarlett**

The Workshop began with a welcome from Lynn Scarlett, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Interior. Deputy Secretary Scarlett described a vision of cooperation and conservation that blends healthy lands, thriving communities, and dynamic economies. She reviewed future trends, which will continue to shape the landscape and provide the context for conservation. Ms. Scarlett emphasized that cross-boundary coordination is increasingly important, and strong teams and partnerships are necessary to achieve goals.

She pointed out that land management challenges are cross jurisdictional and involve many professional disciplines and communities of people who have local knowledge communicating across boundaries to solve problems. She acknowledged that problems must be handled in a context of constraints in access to technology, skill sets, resources, and information. She also highlighted that citizens are yearning to share in governance and management of the places they work, live, and recreate. Ms. Scarlett said she sees the public transcending years of adversarial relationships and communications in environmental decision-making.

Ms. Scarlett said that nurturing cooperative conservation requires collaborative capacity building, organizational culture, relationships, and policies. She stressed that cooperative conservation needs to be focused on results and that measuring outcomes is the key to

ensuring improved environmental performance. Ms. Scarlett concluded by congratulating the Cooperative Conservation award winners, introducing Luther Propst, the keynote speaker, and calling for the participants to continue to lend a caring hand to the landscape.

### **Keynote Address by Luther Propst**

Luther Propst, the Executive Director of the Sonoran Institute, focused on the history and trends that have brought cooperative conservation to the forefront of conservation in the United States, as well as some of the challenges.

Mr. Propst agreed with Ms. Scarlett that in the past, people used adversarial approaches to deal with land use issues and differences. He said he founded the Sonoran Institute to take different, more collaborative approach to conservation by inspiring and promoting community decisions and policies that respect and protect the land. The Sonoran Institute brings people together in the landscape they share.

Reviewing experiences of local communities and organizations that have experimented with cooperative approaches to manage land and water resources, Mr. Propst explained that by 2008, cooperative conservation is considered a proven, well-documented approach with widespread acceptance and applicability. Mr. Propst emphasized that collaborative approaches use the power of place to bring people together to improve their land, water, and communities. He urged natural resource agencies to integrate cooperative conservation into all the procedures, policies, and organizations of natural resource management.

Mr. Propst pointed out that collaborative approaches work well when the scale is small enough that people can relate to each other. Cooperative approaches tap into people's desire to live in real places and to contribute to discussions on how to use land for the highest value. He challenged workshop participants to advance from current uses of collaboration to more challenging contexts. He asked participants to think of ways to increase cooperative conservation globally and to consider institutional reforms that would ensure that collaborative approaches remain a high priority. He argued that if we are going to significantly increase the use of collaboration, we need to reevaluate governance structures and policies, including how we reward, plan, and develop action plans to ensure that cooperative conservation can continue to mature and be widely adopted.

In conclusion, Mr. Propst referred to a recent Government Accountability Office report *Natural Resource Management: Opportunities Exist to Enhance Federal Participation in Collaborative Efforts to Reduce Conflicts and Improve Natural Resource Conditions*. He noted that the report outlined several critical areas for Federal agencies to improve cooperative conservation. He urged workshop participants to encourage the Federal agencies to work on capacity building and providing resources for further collaborative work. Finally, he asked participants to support collaboration throughout the coming political transition.

### **Healthy Lands (also continued on Day Two)**

Luke Johnson, Deputy Director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), reviewed some of the challenges facing BLM and other land management agencies, pointing out that growing population brings pressure to develop lands as well as more demands for energy development. He highlighted BLM invasive species control and eradication efforts, wild land fire prevention and suppression, and sound, environmentally responsible energy development programs.

#### *Landscape Level: Navigating Boundaries*

The first panel began with a video that demonstrated the accomplishments of the Restore New Mexico project, considered an excellent example of large, landscape-scale restoration and conservation. This broad-reaching project has grown from small groups of individuals dedicated to restoring the natural landscape in southeastern New Mexico and has made extensive progress with riparian restoration, brush control, and reconnecting habitats on both public and private land. Panelists included: Dorothy Morgan, Carlsbad Field Office, BLM, Debbie Hughes, New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts, Victoria Sanchez, Devon Energy, and Doug Burger, Vegas District Manager for BLM.

Panelists discussed the importance of building trust and developing relationships for large projects. They explained their choice to set up the project as a non-profit so they could pool funds.

### **Birds Forever**

Paul Schmidt, Assistant Director, Migratory Birds, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, opened the second panel. Mr. Schmidt reviewed the Department's Birds Forever initiative, which the Secretary of the Interior introduced for 2009. Mr. Schmidt explained that protecting migratory birds requires public/private and cross boundary partnerships to protect migratory routes and breeding habitats. He emphasized that successful migratory bird protection projects rely on people talking with each other to develop mutual agreement on a project's objectives and goals. He noted that talking builds trust and establishes group commitments to jointly developed goals.

#### *Is It Glue? What Makes Partnerships Stick?*

Jamie Driscoll, Arizona Game and Fish Department, and Amy Heuslein, Bureau of Indian Affairs, discussed the success of the Southwest Bald Eagle Management Committee's Arizona Bald Eagle Nestwatch Program. They explained that their clear goal of bald eagle conservation in Arizona keeps 23 partner organizations, volunteers, and many contractors working together productively. The program provides immediate response to save the lives of bald eagles, and long term recovery assistance to protect more than 50 breeding areas in Arizona.

Scot Williamson, Wildlife Management Institute, presented information on the Northern Forest Woodcock Initiative. The Northern Forest Woodcock has specific habitat needs, requiring shrubs and young forests to survive. The Initiative focuses its approach to habitat conservation on best management practices, the use of demonstration areas, monitoring, and outreach. More than 12,000 acres are currently being managed for

woodcock conservation. Mr. Williamson explained that a clear goal of protecting woodcock habitat helps to protect habitat loss throughout the Eastern United States.

The panel discussed how partnerships can keep working together over large landscapes, with many partners, over time. Panelists agreed that it is imperative to have clear and strong leadership at the beginning and throughout the project. They also agreed with Paul Schmidt that a clear goal with measurable objectives helps keep projects and partnerships on track. Finally, both projects emphasized the role of public education and outreach to support the program and to build the private and public partnerships they depended on.

### **Engaging Local Communities and Volunteers**

Brian O'Neill, Superintendent, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, introduced five partnerships that illustrate the role of active community participation in successful partnerships. Mr. O'Neill urged participants to be proactive and have a clear vision for change in their communities. He encouraged workshop participants to systematically and continuously involve people in solving land and resource management challenges.

#### *Got a Problem? How Can Locals Help?*

The Engaging Local Communities and Volunteers panel began with Dan Vincent, Director of the Great Northern Environmental Stewardship Area. The partnership includes over 20 organizations that have interests in the Middle Fork Flathead River corridor in Montana. The result of this collaboration is a rapid response protocol that eliminated large grain spills as a source of grizzly bear mortality in the ecosystem. The partnership continues to further environmental stewardship activities in the corridor.

William Naneng, of the Sea Lion Corporation in Hooper Bay, Alaska, explained that the Hooper Bay ATV Subsistence Trail Partnership emerged in response to habitat degradation caused by unmanaged ATV use. The Partnership launched an outreach and education program while constructing several innovative ATV trails in Alaska for subsistence hunters. The project was exemplary in its involvement of local people in identifying the trail locations as well as construction, maintenance, and education.

Julie Annear of the Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining, and Safety described the Milsap Mine Tailings Project which reclaimed the Milsap Mine Tailings site, drastically reducing dust storms, erosion, and damage to habitat and agricultural areas downstream of the site. The involvement of correctional facility inmates to operate heavy machinery was a very cost-effective approach, and facilitated an additional beneficial outcome – a positive impact on the lives of the inmates.

Tavita Togia, a National Park Service biologist from American Samoa described his work with village councils, non-governmental organizations, community members, and the Park Service to tackle a non-native tree species that had invaded National Park Service land and other land on the Island of Tutuila. Mr. Togia combined this effort with outreach to communities and schools.

Kevin Bacher of the National Park Service described the work of hundreds of volunteers following an unprecedented rainstorm in 2006 that caused extensive damage at Mount Rainier National Park. He explained how the Student Conservation Association and other organizations responded quickly with human and financial resources. More than 700 people, including many volunteers, took part in a large-scale reconstruction and damage-control effort.

Panelists discussed how they reached out to individuals in communities who had connections to others in the communities to build trust, relationships, and communication. They explained their strategies to keep communicating to work through inevitable differences and conflicts. Finally, they outlined some of the new opportunities their projects were working on to continue their community partnerships.

### **Ocean and Coastal Frontiers**

Craig McLean, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Deputy Assistant Administrator for Ocean and Atmospheric Research, welcomed workshop participants and outlined the importance of cooperation for ocean and coastal protection. In particular, he stressed the role of cooperative conservation in addressing climate change adaptation and mitigation. McLean emphasized the need to develop statutes and procedures that authorize and encourage bureaus, branches, and agencies to work together as “one government.” He turned the program over to the panel, thanking the awardees for their hard work.

#### *Organizing for Success. Who you gonna Call?*

Vera Alexander from the University of Alaska at Fairbanks described the applied and collaborative research partnership between the Minerals Management Service (MMS) and the Coastal Marine Institute. This partnership has been instrumental in advancing understanding in fisheries, physical oceanography, and the fate of oil in the marine environment. MMS has leveraged \$13 million against an equal amount of financial contributions from 49 other organizations via a one-to-one match requirement.

Eddie Seidensticker, Natural Resources Conservation Service, explained the East Bay Wetland and Water Quality Protection Project in Galveston, Texas. He spoke of the collaborative effort to protect and restore shoreline and marsh habitat in the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. Partners in the project built more than three miles of erosion control structures and rehabilitated damaged coastline.

Kathy Wells from Friends of Matanuska-Susitna, detailed the work of 29 partners to protect a watershed in Alaska that is approximately the combined size of Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts. The Matanuska-Susitna Basin Salmon Habitat Conservation Partnership is addressing increasing impacts on salmon habitat from human use and development in the basin.

Andrew Goode of the Atlantic Salmon Federation described a watershed partnership in Maine, the collaborative Penobscot River Restoration Project, which formed a non-profit corporation in 2004 to protect salmon and restore the watershed in the Gulf of Maine.

The Project involves diverse stakeholders, including a power company, conservation groups, the Penobscot Indian Nation, and State and Federal agencies. Its goal is to restore eleven species of sea-run fish while also ensuring continued energy production.

During the panel discussion, participants talked about finding important short-term problems to solve at the outset and providing resources for some early successes. All the panelists agreed that trust building and personal relationships are key factors in getting productive conversations started. They also stressed that the organizational structure should start with a clear objective and fit the context and partners. Panelists described the environmental, social and economic benefits from working cooperatively that could not have happened working alone.

## **Day Two**

### **Recap**

Luther Propst kicked off the second day of the workshop with a recap of themes and lessons from the first day, noting the wide diversity of partners, projects, goals, scale, resources, species, and ecosystems in the projects. He said he hoped the group discussions would build participants' confidence to tackle increasingly difficult conservation challenges. Mr. Propst asked participants to vision for the future any changes they need to be more effective. He asked them to consider what tools, policies, skills, and partners do they need to deal more effectively with obstacles?

### **Visioning the Future**

Luther Propst and Juliana Birkhoff invited participants to take part in a visioning exercise. A separate document, "Learning and Visioning Themes from 2008 Cooperative Conservation Workshop Participants," provides the highlights from this session.

### **Healthy Lands (continued from Day One)**

Continuing the Healthy Lands focus from the first day, Elena Daly, Director of the National Landscape Conservation System of the Bureau of Land Management, welcomed participants and thanked them for the work of their partnerships. She encouraged participants to learn more about the BLM's efforts to address large landscape-scale restoration needs.

Peter Butler, Friends of the Animas River, described the contentious beginnings to their successful Animas River reclamation project in the San Juan Mountains. To date the group has cleaned up the worst sites by beginning with those that were the easiest to fix to motivate the group with early successes. Project members stressed the need for Good Samaritan legislation to reduce the fear of litigation for those who might join similar partnerships.

### **Water for America**

Jason Patrick Alberts, Counselor to the Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, kicked-off the Water for America panel. He reviewed changes in demographics and climate that will only increase competition for water. He stressed that communication and

leadership are the keys to success. He said the Department of Interior would like to promote cooperation in decisions over scarce water resources, rather than litigation.

*Water, Water NOT Everywhere ... Learning to Share.*

John Shields from the Upper Colorado River and San Juan River Programs described the efforts of these partnerships to work with existing and new groups to address multiple and expanding water needs, for species and communities. These Programs have improved fish habitat, removed invasive species, and improved water storage and management. Mr. Shields stressed the need to measure outcomes and to use an adaptive management approach.

Bill Seese, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, explained that the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program had a similar goal to recover endangered species by restoring habitat for imperiled species. The program involves more than 50 partners from States, Federal agencies, Tribes, agricultural interests, and conservation groups (e.g., Ducks Unlimited). Four National Wildlife Refuges have played important roles in habitat restoration for the Program.

Robert Reynolds, President of the Union County Water Conservation Board, described the South Arkansas Sparta Aquifer Recovery Initiative, a partnership between Federal agencies, the State, a private utility, and citizens to address a looming crisis as an important source of water, the Sparta Aquifer, experienced significant depletions. The partnership has promoted water conservation, reuse, and identified an alternative source for industrial users.

Holly Richter, The Nature Conservancy, explained the Upper San Pedro River Partnership in Arizona. The group includes 21 partners and uses a science-based strategy to monitor water levels and implement actions that foster sustainable water use and protect the valued riparian ecosystem. Their success grew from a clear mission and vision statement—to develop a sustainable yield of ground water for communities without negative consequences and while protecting habitat.

During the panel discussion, project participants stressed the importance of partnerships in dealing with water quantity and quality issues. More partners with good relationships and collaborative processes lead to new ways to sustain and restore the watershed. Workshop participants also explained that adaptive management approaches require partners to understand the watershed and develop relationships that can adapt to the changing conditions over time.

**Recreation, Trails, and Tourism**

Jonathan Tourtellot, Director of the Center for Sustainable Destinations at the National Geographic Society, kicked off the panel discussing recreation, trails, and tourism with a presentation on geotourism - tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of the place. He noted that geotourism focuses on managing all the cultural, ecological, and historical assets in an area so that it pays to protect the place.

### *Diverse Interests, Finding Common Ground*

Bill Dunkelberger, Manager, Bishop Field Office, BLM, and Chris Langley, Inyo County Film Commission, described the success of the Alabama Hills Partnership. The partnership involves the community, BLM, and the film industry to preserve the unique aspects of the area while allowing continued use by tourists, recreational motorists, and the film industry.

Mayor Karen Golonka of Jupiter, Florida, detailed the work of several partners including elected officials, local, county and State governments, schools, the Coast Guard, and a Historical Society to enhance the natural and historic resources of Jupiter Inlet. The partners manage the Inlet in concert, ensuring efficiency and consistency. Activities of the partnership include wetland construction, wildfire risk reduction, and habitat improvements for endangered species.

Richard Walsh, President, Keizer City Council, Keizer, Oregon, outlined the challenges and successes of the Willamette River Water Trail Initiative. More than 30 organizations worked together to link 200 miles of water trail from Eugene, Oregon, to the ocean. To make the water trail accessible, entertaining, and educational for visitors, partners supported numerous conservation and economic development projects.

The panelists compared their strategies for developing partnerships and formulating a common vision towards which partnerships can work. They discussed challenges that partnerships face in areas where conservation and recreation are both top priorities, and they shared their experiences about how collaborative processes improve communication and mutual understanding about competing uses.

### **Accelerating Collaboration for Conservation**

At the end of the Workshop, participants discussed themes and take-home messages from their two days of stories and experiences. Many described future plans including the use of new tools and strategies learned through the experience of fellow participants. Luther Propst began the discussion with his observations from the visioning exercise in the morning. He noted the enormous energy and creativity that groups had exhibited particularly to find resources and organizational support. He urged government agencies to continue to improve funding mechanisms to support partnerships.

Mr. Propst pointed out that local partnerships are having impacts on their landscapes and in their communities. He urged groups to continue to bring in new partners and to link with other partnerships in their region to have even larger landscape effects. He encouraged Federal agencies to improve and align incentives to better enable divisions, bureaus, and departments to lead collaborative projects. He also urged the agencies to avoid “flag planting” and “kingdom protecting,” in order to work before effectively across agency lines.

Mr. Propst asked the participants to be more proactive in communicating the benefits of cooperative conservation efforts. He urged the partners to work with the media to get the



word out more broadly. He encouraged the development of more partnership movies as a excellent way to document and share collaborative conservation efforts. Finally, he noted the inspiring social capital represented in the room through the networks and experience of all the partners. He encouraged everyone – schools, universities, nonprofits, businesses, and local, State, and Federal governments to increase the attention, resources, and rewards for learning how to communicate and collaborate.